

SAA 2024

Seminar: Shakespeare and Sedition

Elena Bandín

Determined to be villains: *Richard III* in Franco's Spain – A Tale of Censorship, Power, and Cultural Manipulation

This paper examines the presence of *Richard III* on the Spanish stage during the Franco dictatorship, aiming to explore the political, social, and cultural influences that molded its production and dissemination. The national theatre strategically appropriated Shakespeare's esteemed cultural authority to validate its productions and enforce societal and performance decorum in alignment with the regime's ideological principles. To achieve this, the regime implemented censorship mechanisms and restrictions on freedom to regulate any cultural product before its publication, performance, or exhibition. A particular focus is placed on the impact of (self) censorship on the translation of the play premiered at the Español Theatre in 1946.

Contemporary reviews excessively praised the production, attributing its resounding success to González Ruiz's exemplary translation and Luca de Tena's impeccable direction. Remaining loyal to the Francoist agenda, González Ruiz endorsed official censorship and actively contributed by explicitly engaging in self-censorship, considering it a form of creative activity in its own right. Upon analyzing the theatre script preserved in the censorship file, it becomes evident that the translator deliberately omitted certain controversial passages, guided by censorship concerns to prevent inadvertent parallels between Richard III and Franco. I will try to demonstrate that the British conflict of the Wars of the Roses was intentionally downplayed, as the author of the version made every effort to sidestep any semblance between Franco's Spain and Richard's England.

Stephen Deng

Seditious Play: Hamlet's *The Mousetrap* and Subversive Performance

After an infamous 1601 performance depicting the deposition of Richard II, Elizabeth purportedly remarked to William Lambarde: "I am Richard II. Know ye not that?" There is debate about whether the play performed was Shakespeare's own *Richard II* or the dramatization of Sir John Hayward's 1599 historical work *The First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV*, which contained a dedication to the Earl of Essex praising him as one who would become even greater "futuri temporis expectatione" (in the expectation of future time). Hayward was imprisoned and interrogated in two separate trials for sedition, and he appears to have been kept in the Tower until after Elizabeth's death. Moreover, the book was used as evidence against Essex in his own treason trial. Not surprisingly, the incident has been analyzed in relation to *Richard II*, but for this paper, I consider its relation to another politically provocative performance: Hamlet's revision of an older play, "The Mousetrap," played before King Claudius in an attempt to "catch the conscience of the king." Given that it not only recreates the method of Claudius's murder, but also depicts a *nephew*, rather than a brother, killing the player-king, might its performance constitute an instance (from a contemporary English perspective) of high treason according to the 1534 act, as "imagining or desiring by words any bodily harm to the king, queen, or their heirs" (Manning, "Origins of the Doctrine of Sedition," 105)? My paper examines the unusual situation of Hamlet's theatrical merging of an implicit threat to the king –

what might be deemed high treason under the 1534 law – and depiction of the king’s own treasonous act in the murder of King Hamlet.

Nathaniel C. Leonard

Inset Regicide: Simulacra, Restage Culture, and Seditious in *Hamlet*

Hamlet, much like the bulk of revenge tragedies from the English Renaissance, is a play whose plot requires it to wrestle with the possibility of being read as seditious. For the Elizabethan dramatists that popularized the genre, most notably Thomas Kyd, the solution to this problem was rooted in creating a variety of distancing strategies that made the killing of princes appear far-fetched and far off. Jacobean revenge tragedies, like *Hamlet*, replace this aesthetic distance with the removal of any connection to the actual act of regicide or revenge. Instead, the potentially taboo nature of the play’s seditious themes is muted by its subject matter being focused on revenge as a set of theatrical or narrative conventions. In other words, revenge tragedy transitions from being an intentionally inaccurate sign representing actual revenge in the Elizabethan period to a Baudrillardian simulacrum during the Jacobean era that appears to represent the real nature of revenge, while also demonstrating that any relationship between the genre and reality no longer exists. This paper will explore how Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, like a number of other plays from its moment, demonstrate the shifting aesthetic sensibility of the genre in the early 17th century and the way these representational logics, particularly those connected to the restaging of cultural ritual, undercut the seditious potential of the play’s plot.

David Strong

Lady Macbeth’s Treasonous Empathy

Despite her seemingly harsh regard for her husband's nature being "too full o' th' milk of human kindness," Lady Macbeth attunes herself to his thoughts and feelings as a means to strengthen their marital connection (1.5.17). Their interactions serve an epistemic function that enables her to grasp his motivations, desires, and beliefs. She uses this affectionate knowledge to embolden his ambitions, but since it results in the murder of King Duncan, its efficacy becomes corrupted. While empathy seeks to attain truth about the other person, it does not have to promote goodness. As Heather Battaly states, "Empathy is distinct from the virtues of benevolence and open-mindedness."¹ Lady Macbeth's act of treason presents an urgency to determine what constitutes an empathic bond and why exercising it for a prosocial purpose ensures that it reaches its potential. This paper will thus examine the exclusivity of Lady Macbeth's link to her husband and how her private conception of interpersonal understanding becomes compromised when its use violates her civic and political responsibilities.

¹ Heather D. Battaly, "Is Empathy a Virtue?" in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, eds. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 300.

Stephanie Chamberlain

Righteous Rebellion: Xenophobia and Seditious in *Sir Thomas More*

Written between 1593 and 1600, *Sir Thomas More* delves into one of the more controversial issues confronting early modern England. Believed to have been a collaboration by Shakespeare,

Heywood, and Dekker (and possibly others), the text wades into the thorny and all too contemporary issue of immigration amid a xenophobic populace and ensuing acts of sedition. So controversial was the text that Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels and official royal censor, ordered that the opening insurrection scene be omitted, starting instead with the more benign if somewhat propagandistic account of Thomas More in his role as Sheriff of London.

My paper interrogates *Sir Thomas More* in the context of ongoing immigration debates in Shakespeare's early modern England. Alarmed by purported abuse by strangers living within the realm—who are represented as virtual predators feeding upon the imperiled livelihood and well-being of Londoners—the text's outraged citizens demand that the wronged rise up against those in authority who have condoned, if not enabled the abuse of England's citizenry. I argue that the sedition that opens *Sir Thomas More* exposes more than a culturally ingrained xenophobia directed against the stranger. Sedition, often represented in Shakespeare's plays as a grasping after wrongful power, functions here as a response to the fear of loss: to the state's exploitation of the lives and livelihood of its citizens. Xenophobic rebellion ultimately becomes a justifiable response against the abuse of power.

Rae'Mia Escott

Moor Slander

Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice* is a play overflowing with seditious acts performed not by the Venetian outsider Othello, but by Venice's own kinsman Iago. Iago uses his position as a Venetian to manipulate and destroy his superior Othello for his own personal reasons. In this performance of rebellion, he jeopardizes his community by sabotaging their primary means of defense in the act of weakening Othello. This paper examines how the Moor identity is compromised due to the slander it sustains, despite being in a position of power. I argue that Iago's refusal to respect Othello as his commander permits him to exploit the anti-Blackness ideologies traversing through Venice and enables him to become a threat to everyone around him. Iago recognizes that Othello through his marriage to Desdemona is gaining more political power and influence in Venice and paired with his high-ranking position in the army this means he has more access to resources that were once cut off to him as a foreigner.

Although, Iago is upset about being passed up for a promotion he feels he rightfully deserves, his anger primarily stems from Othello allegedly sleeping with his wife, which motivates him to commit treason against his general and his country, ultimately demonstrating his disregard towards immigrants, the Venetian hierarchy, and all those who he views as inferior to him.